

SATYA VRAT SHASTRI

RĀMA THE RULER AS VĀLMĪKI REVEALS HIM

Tradition associates the sage Vālmiki with Rāma. It was he who had given shelter to Sītā when she had been abandoned by the latter. It was in his Āśrama that she had given birth to the twins Lava and Kuśa whom he had brought up and taught the *Rāmāyaṇa* which they had sung at Rāma's Aśvamedha sacrifice. It should, therefore, be worthwhile to see as to how he finds him, Rāma, as a statesman, the kind of ruler that he was. That should have a stamp of authenticity about it.

Vālmiki's first mention of the qualities of a good ruler in Rāma is through Daśaratha who had noticed them in Rāma strengthening him in his resolve to install him as Heir Apparent. According to Daśaratha Rāma was steady in mind and soft in speech. Even when spoken to harshly, he did not reply back. Even one good turn would please him while a hundred bad ones by his highmindedness he would not care. He was brave but was not proud of his bravery. He, the learned one, would never tell a lie, would respect the elders, was loved by his subjects and would himself love them. He was kind-hearted with control over his anger, honouring the Brahmins and taking pity on the pitiable. He knew Dharma, would subdue the wicked and was pure in conduct. In prowess he equalled Yama and Indra, in intelligence Bṛhaspati, in fortitude a mountain and in qualities was superior even to him, i.e., Daśaratha:

sa ca nityaṁ praśāntātmā mṛdupūrvaṁ ca bhāṣate /
*ucyamāno 'pi paruṣaṁ nottāraṁ pratipadyate //*¹
kadācid upakāreṇa kṛtenaikena tuṣyati /
*na śmaraty apakārānāṁ śatam apy ātmavattayā //*²
*vīryavān na ca vīryeṇa mahatā svena viśmitaḥ //*³
na cāṇṭhakatho vidvān vṛddhānāṁ pratipūjakaḥ /
*anuraktaḥ prajābhiś ca prajāś cāpy anurajyate //*⁴
sānukrośo jītakrodho Brāhmaṇapratipūjakaḥ /
*dīnānukampī dharmajñō nityaṁ pragrahavāñ chuciḥ //*⁵
Yamaśakrasamo vīrye Bṛhaspatisamo matau /
*mahīdharasamo dhṛtyāṁ mattaś ca guṇavattaraḥ //*⁶

It should, therefore, be no wonder that with all these qualities he made for the Rāmarājya.

It should be interesting to know as to what kind of *rājya* it was. Vālmiki gives a graphic description of it in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. According to him when Rāma ruled nowhere was the widow's wail heard and no one was in dread of poisonous reptiles. The world was rid of depredators. No one was overtaken by calamities. It did not fall to the lot of the old men to perform the obsequies of the young. There was happiness everywhere. Everyone was keen on Dharma. Their eyes ever on Rāma, people caused no harm to each other. With Rāma ruling, people lived for a thousand years and bore a thousand children. They knew neither illhealth nor sorrow. The trees with outspread boughs were perennially in fruit and flower. The rain god sent timely showers and the breeze in its touch was soothing. Busy with their own duties the subjects were perfectly content to follow their own ways of life. They were devoted to Dharma and not untruthful:

na paryadevan vidhavā na ca vyālakṛtaṁ bhayaṁ /
na vyādhijaṁ bhayaṁ cāśīd Rāme rājyaṁ praśāsati //
nirdasyur abhaval loko nānarthāṁ kaścid asprśat /

1. VRā. II.1.10.

2. VRā. II.1.11.

3. VRā. II.1.13.

4. VRā. II.1.14.

5. VRā. II.1.15.

6. VRā. II.1.39.

na ca sma vṛddhā bālānāṃ pretakāryāṇi kurvate //
sarvaṃ muditaṃ evāsīt sarvo dharmaparo 'bhavat /
Rāmam evānupaśyanto nābhyahimsan parasparam //
āsan varṣasahasrāṇi tathā putrasahasraṇaḥ /
nirāmayā viśokāś ca Rāme rājyaṃ praśāsati //
nityamūlā nityaphalās taravas tatra puṣpitāḥ /
kāmavarṣī ca parjanyaḥ suhasparśaś ca mārutaḥ //
svakarmasu pravartante tuṣṭāḥ svair eva karmabhiḥ /
*āsan prajā dharmaparā Rāme śāsati nāṇṛtāḥ //*⁷

All this Rāma could achieve with his sense of duty towards his subjects. As a ruler he would attach prime importance to the affairs of the State. He gives vivid expression to his distress in not having been able to do that for four days after banishing Sītā showing thereby his great consideration for his subjects. As if that were not enough, he clearly points to the fact that a king who does not attend to the business of the citizens every day falls into the dread hell, which is closed and sealed on all sides:

catvāro divasāḥ saumya kāryaṃ pauraṇasya ca /
*akurvāṇasya Saumitre tan me marmāṇi kṛntati //*⁸
paurakāryāṇi yo rājā na karoti dine dine /
*saṃvṛte narake ghore patito nātra saṃśayaḥ //*⁹

As a statesman Rāma knew in depth as to how a king is to conduct himself. His questions to Bharata come to meet him in the forest to persuade him to go back to Ayodhyā to assume the reign reveal more than anything else as to what he expects of a king and that when in office he would have avoided himself all that he is apprehensive of in the case of Bharata. He is stricken with twofold doubt on seeing him (Bharata). One, that the father is no more. Bharata would not come to the forest if he were alive. Two, that he being of tender age has lost the kingdom. In the latter case he develops certain apprehen-

7. VRā. VI.128.98-103.

8. VRā. VII. 53.4.

9. VRā. VII. 53.6

sions about Bharata's conduct. He mentions them to him expecting him to clear them up. These apprehensions put forward in the form of queries afford a peep into the working of Rāma's mind in identifying the pitfalls a king is to avoid to be a successful ruler. The queries are: Do you begin an activity small in the beginning but leading to greater good and not delay it?

Is it that the other kings have no knowledge of all his actions which are either over or are yet to take place?

Is it that he assigns his honest good ancestral ministers, not accepting bribe, with proper duties?

Is it that he has not caused disaffection among subjects by inflicting on them severe punishment?

Is it that his subjects do not insult him by his extortion of heavy taxes from them?

Is it that he does not associate himself with atheistic Brahmins?

Is it that the cultivators and the dairy farmers are dear to him and the people are happy in trade?

Is it that he pays proper salary and allowances to the army in time and does not delay them?

Is it that a noble person, a person of good conduct, a pure soul, without being examined by experts in Śāstras is sent to prison out of greed under false charges?

Is it that a thief under arrest after interrogation with enough evidence for being so (a thief) is not released out of greed for money?

*kaccid arthaṁ viniścitya laghumūlaṁ mahodayam /
kṣīpram ārabhase karma na dīrghayasi Rāghava //*¹⁰

*kaccin nu sukṛtāny eva kṛtarūpaṇi vā punaḥ /
vidus te sarvakāryāṇi na kartavyāni pārthivāḥ //*¹¹

*amātyān upadhātūtān pitṛpaitamahāñ śucīn /
śreṣṭhān śreṣṭheṣu kaccit tvam niyojayasi karmasu //*¹²

*kaccin nogrena daṇḍena bhṛśam udvejitāḥ prajāḥ //*¹³
kaccit tvāṁ nāvajānanti yājakaḥ patitarā yathā /

10. VRā. II.100.19.

11. VRā. II.100.20.

12. VRā. II.100.26.

13. VRā. II.100.27.

*ugrapratigrahītāraṁ kāmāyānam iva striyaḥ //*¹⁴
kaccid balasya bhaktaṁ ca vetanaṁ ca yathocitam /
*samprāptakālāṁ dātavyaṁ dadāsi na vilambase //*¹⁵
*kaccin na lokāyatikān Brahmaṇāns tāta sevase //*¹⁶
kaccit te dayitāḥ sarve kṣīgorakṣajīvinaḥ /
*vārtāyāṁ sāmprataṁ tāta loko 'yaṁ sukham edhate //*¹⁷
kaccid āryo 'pi śuddhātmā kṣāritaś cāpakarmaṇaḥ /
*adrṣṭaḥ śāstrakuśalair na lobhād badhyate śuciḥ //*¹⁸
grhītaś caiva prṣṭaś ca kāle drṣṭaḥ sakāraṇaḥ /
*kaccin na mucyate coro dhanalobhān naraṣabha //*¹⁹

Proceeding further, Rāma enumerates *doṣas*, weak points, of kings enquiring of Bharata as to whether he avoids them. The weak points are: atheism, untruthfulness, anger, negligence, procrastination, non-association with knowledgeable people, indolence, sensuousness, keeping counsel to oneself, to have discussion with people who give wrong advice, not to execute the decisions once arrived at, not to keep a secret, not to observe auspicious ceremonies and the like, to start hostilities (at once) on all sides:

nāstikyam anṛtam krodham pramādaṁ dīrghasūtratām /
adarśanaṁ jñānavatām ālasyaṁ pañcavṛttitām //
ekacintanam arthānām anarthaajñaiś ca mantraṇam /
niścītānām anārambhaṁ mantrasya parirakṣaṇam //
mangalādyaprayogaṁ ca pratyutthānaṁ ca sarvataḥ /
*kaccit tvaṁ varjayasy etān rājadoṣāṁś caturdaśa //*²⁰

The basic concept behind kingship is that a king is to provide happiness to his subjects. The word *rājan* is explained on this very basis: *rājā prakṛtirañjanāt*, *rājan* is so called because of his propitiating his subjects. The idea of *prakṛtirañjana* has been so much in the

14. VRā. II.100.28.

15. VRā. II.100.32.

16. VRā. II.100.38.

17. VRā. II.100.47.

18. VRā. II.100.56.

19. VRā. II.100.57.

20. VRā. II.100.65-67.

minds of the thinkers of old in India that they have changed the very etymology of the word. Etymologically *rājan* can be formed only from $\sqrt{rāja}$, $\sqrt{rāj}$ *diptau*, «to shine, to be radiant» and not from $\sqrt{rañj}$, $\sqrt{rañja}$, *rāge*, «to be happy». That still it has been shown to derive from the latter is a proof positive of the importance being attached to *prakṛtirañjana*, to cultivate the subjects, a prime duty of the kings. Rāma, an ideal king that he was, symbolized in him this duty. It is to please them only that he abandoned his dear wife whose purity had earlier been tested in fire before his very eyes.

As a king, *lokārādhana* or *prajārañjana* was his first and foremost duty. He could not afford to turn his back on his people. It was for him to set the norms for them. He had, therefore, to have an exemplary character. If he were himself to be centre of controversy, how would he be able to do that? Public calumny, *lokāpavāda*, was the greatest abhorrent to Rāma and he was prepared to go to any length to avoid it, even to the length of losing his life not to speak of losing his brothers and his wife Sītā:

*apy ahaṁ jīvitaṁ jahyāṁ yuṣmān vā puruṣarṣabhāḥ /
apavādabhayād bhūtaḥ kiṁ punar Janakātmajāṁ //*²¹

This verse forms the key to the real nature of Rāma.

It is not to suppose that Rāma was hunting for popular applause. His readiness to abandon all that is dear to the human was not born of craving for cheap popularity but was the outcome of the high ideal of a king, viz., that a king should not wish to be exempt from the national rules of morality and conduct which he would compel his subjects to abide by.

Ceaser's wife must be above board was Rāma's motto which he followed all through his life inviting in the process great hardship on himself, a kind of mental torture that few would have undergone. He knew Sītā was not at fault. Still he foresook her. The people had begun to say all sorts of things about her. The ill-fame had begun to spread. This had to be checked. This required of Rāma, an ideal king, great

21. VRā. VII.45.14-15.

personal sacrifice which he underwent without demur. He says it in so many words when Vālmīki presents Sītā and her twin sons before him:

*lokāpavādo balavān yena tyaktā hi Maithilī /
seyam lokabhayād Brahmān apāpetya abhijānatā /
parityaktā mayā Sītā tad bhavān kṣantum arhati //*²²

There are two expressions in Rāma's statement that deserve special notice. One, *apāpety abhijānatā*, knowing full well that Sītā was *apāpā*, not having committed any sin, was faultless, had done no wrong. Two, *lokabhayāt parityaktā*, Sītā was abandoned for fear of the people. Who would there be a king, if it were not Rāma, who would nurture in him the fear, the fear of his own people? It is all credit to his caring nature for them that he respected their feelings, good or bad, well-founded or ill-founded. A great warrior that he was, the vanquisher of the greatest of the warriors of his time Rāvaṇa, he could just have ignored all that was said about him or his wife and dismissed it contemptuously as of no consequence, a mere prattle deserving of no notice. But then he was Rāma out to establish the Rāmarājya. He knew for sure that the simmering calumny was already spreading, *lokāpavādo balavān*, and had to be stopped not by repression of the people spreading it but by suppressing one's own self. As an upholder of morality he wanted to get rid of it at the earliest opportunity and that is precisely what he did disrupting in the process his happy family life.

Rāma was a statesman of the highest order. It was an act of his statesmanship to have accepted Vibhīṣaṇa, the deserter of the enemy's camp into his fold. It is through him that he was able to solve many a tangle in the battle with Rāvaṇa. It was again an act of statesmanship on his part to have raised in the forest allies to fight the enemy on his behalf. That he could do so practically singlehanded with his brother only by his side speaks volumes for his sagacity and skill in statecraft. That he could command absolute loyalty and devotion of his new-found allies like Hanumān also goes to prove his statesmanship.

It has already been said in the context of Rāma's queries to Bharata that Rāma laid great stress in keeping the armed forces con-

22. VRā. VII.97.4.

tented and happy by payment of adequate salary and allowances to them in time. The same thing he told Śatrughna when he came to seek his permission to march against the demon Lavaṇa. Said he, «Take with you four thousand horses, two thousand chariots, a hundred splendid tuskers and shopkeepers from the city, with a plentiful supply of excellent goods for sale. Take with you a million in pure bullion and enough wealth and goods and mounts to meet all requirements. And you should, O best of men, endear yourself to your army by maintaining it handsomely, well-fed and contented and cheered by frequent friendly addresses. For wealth and women and relations will not be available to your troops where they will have to be placed, so they should be kept in good cheer»:

*imāny aśvasahasrāṇi catvāri puruṣarṣabha /
rathānām dve sahasre ca gajānām śatam uttamam //*²³
*hiraṇyasya suvarṇasya niyutaṁ puruṣarṣabha /
ādāya gaccha Śatrughna paryāptadhanavāhanaḥ //*²⁴
*balam ca subhṛtaṁ vīra hr̥ṣṭatuṣṭam anuddhatam /
sambhāṣāsampradānena rañjayasva narottama //*²⁵
*naḥ arthās tatra tiṣṭhanti na dārā ne ca bāndhavāḥ /
suprīto bhṛtyavargas tu yatra tiṣṭhati Rāghava //*²⁶

What has been said above would point to Rāma having been a very wise statesman, thoroughly versed in polity and statecraft which knowledge he brought to bear in an abundant measure for the good of his people when he assumed the reins of office as king after his exile for fourteen years and established a kingdom in the highest traditions of the welfare state. Going after his name, the Rāmarājya, it has remained a model, an ideal to be achieved for kings and rulers in India, for thousands of years.

23. VRā. VII.64.2.

24. VRā. VII.64.4.

25. VRā. VII.64.5.

26. VRā. VII.64.6.